



Postdoctoral Association at Western
c/o Matthew Fox, Ph.D
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July 10, 2015

Dr. Amit Chakma
Office of the President
Stevenson Hall, Suite 2107
Western University
London, ON N6A 5B8

Re: Promoting the Excellence of Western's Postdoctoral Scholars beyond Academia

Dear President Chakma,

On behalf of the postdoctoral scholars at Western, we thank you for your recent series of town-hall meetings to engage the campus community and your call for further consultation. As part of this consultation, we would like to discuss a key issue that is currently affecting postdocs at Western University: the openness of non-academic employers to hiring PhD holders.

The postdoc community at Western numbers 300 to 400 highly-qualified academic personnel who serve as front-line researchers, course instructors, undergraduate and graduate mentors, and middle-management in large, productive research groups. Despite these valuable contributions, we continue to be a uniquely vulnerable segment of the university community due to our temporary role and uncertain future employment prospects.

We are concerned about structural insufficiencies in the career marketplace: whereas a growing number of postdoctoral scholars are looking for non-academic careers, our training is often undervalued, leading to underemployment. Resolving these insufficiencies can be achieved in part by recalibrating postdoctoral and graduate training within academia, and we recognize that Western has made great strides in this regard. For example, we appreciate the increase in the number and quality of professional development programs aimed at preparing postdoctoral scholars at Western for the changing career landscape. However successful these internal adjustments may be, much of the solution to the postdoctoral employment problem is necessarily externally oriented to the post-PhD employment marketplace.

With this in mind, we hope to enlist your assistance in actively lobbying both industry and government to ignite a cultural change in the perceived value of postdocs and other recent PhD graduates outside of academia. We see PhD holders as (1) integral to a competitive, *knowledge-based economy*, (2) uniquely qualified to address the myriad social, economic, technological, artistic and environmental issues of modern society: not just as academic consultants, but as *hands-on experts in the field*, and (3) a valuable and expensive *investment* that should be retained within Canada rather than lost as *brain drain* to more welcoming economies.

Once again, President Chakma, we thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns. We have always enjoyed strong and productive relations with the Western administration, and hope to build on this relationship in the future. While we understand that much of the campus is concerned with internal issues, it is important to our community that external matters are not forgotten. We hope that you will continue to build on your strong track record of engagement with government and industry to promote the virtues of Western's postdoctoral scholars and PhD graduates. Ultimately, the success of Western's postdoctoral scholars can only benefit Western's mission of achieving excellence in Canada and abroad.

Finally, we would like to invite you to a town-hall meeting with the postdoctoral community, at your convenience. We welcome any opportunity to discuss with you our concerns regarding the perceived value of PhD holders, and other matters related to our community. We believe that we can find a common vision for the future of postdoctoral scholars at Western University and beyond.

Sincerely,

Matthew Fox, Ph.D

President, Postdoctoral Association at Western

(On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Postdoctoral Association at Western)

Jiro Inoue, Ph.D

Past President (2014-2015), Postdoctoral Association at Western